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WAGNER'S LOHENGRIN

as retold by Oliver Buckel

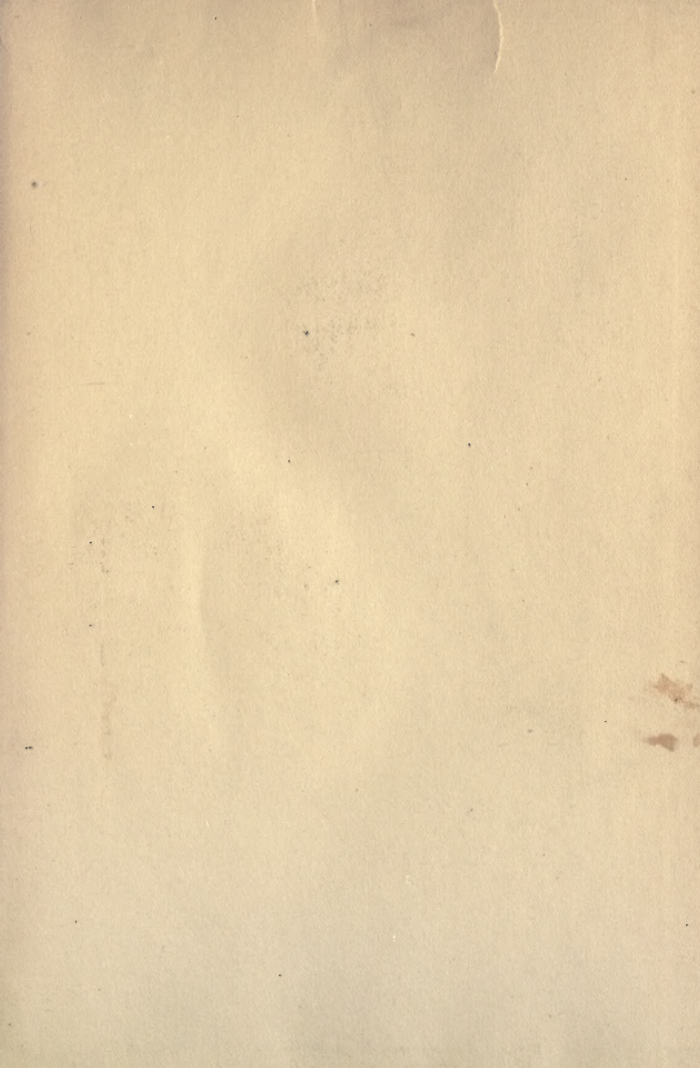


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LOHENGRIN: A DRAMA BY WAGNER
RETOLD BY OLIVER HUCKEL



The Mystic Knight of the Swan

Lohengrin

Son of Parsifal

A · MYSTICAL · DRAMA · BY · RICHARD
WAGNER · FREELY · TRANSLATED · IN
POETIC · NARRATIVE · FORM · BY

Oliver · Huckel



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FOREWORD



LOHENGRIN is one of the most poetic as well as one of the most popular of Wagner's music-dramas. It has an exquisite spiritual quality. Doubtless it is another retelling

of the old Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche, but this time the telling is a quaint and beautiful medieval legend, which Wagner found in a primitive form in the poetic narratives of Wolfram von Eschenbach, from which sources he had also drawn his Parsifal.

It was while Wagner was writing the story of Tannhäuser in 1843, and selecting his material from the ancient Tannhäuser-Lied, the Volksbuch, Tieck's poetical Erzählung, Hoffman's story of Der Sängerkrieg, and the medieval poem on Der Wartburgkrieg, that he found the brief legend of Lohengrin. This last story, although only an incidental poem, seized upon his fancy. It led him to a further study of Wolfram von Eschenbach, and as he read more closely he found still another story that fascinated him greatly. This was the story of Parzival and Titirel, which finally became the inspiration of his last and, as some think, his greatest work, the sacred festival drama of Parsifal. These three great dramas, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, and Parsifal, a noble trilogy, were soon working themselves out in Wagner's mind at the same time and with a wonderful intimacy of theme and spirit. It may also be remembered that his famous tetralogy, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, while it is presented

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in four divisions, *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*, was in the same way worked out more or less in unison in its themes, for they are really integral parts of one colossal drama,—the mightiest epic of ancient German mythology.

These themes were brooded over for a long time. They were growths, evolutions. *Parsifal* was the last to be consummated, and find its expression in text and score. *Der Ring des Nibelungen* began merely as one composition, which he called *Siegfried's Tod*; then it divided into another, *Die Walküre*; this he felt must have an introductory drama, hence *Das Rheingold*, and finally to complete the story *Die Götterdämmerung* was added. *Lohengrin* was of quicker growth. He sketched his dramatic poem for it in the summer of 1845 at Marienbad, and in the winter following he wrote it out in complete form. He wrote the music in the two years following.

It is interesting to remember these tumultuous years. Wagner was not a mere student of the closet, but an active and energetic reformer in both music and politics, and after he had written both words and score of *Lohengrin*, he took a prominent part in political agitations. Following the flight of the king in 1849, and the subsequent suppression of riots by troops sent from Berlin, a formal act of accusation was drawn up against Wagner, and he had barely time to escape to his friend Liszt at Weimar before the storm burst upon him with a violence that seriously alarmed both his friends

and himself. He now fled to Paris, and, as he himself tells us, "when ill, miserable, and despairing I sat brooding over my fate, my eye fell on the score of my Lohengrin, which I had totally forgotten. Suddenly I felt something like compassion that the music should never sound from off the death-pale paper. Two words I wrote to Liszt; his answer was the news that preparations were being made for the performance of the work, on the grandest scale that the limited means of Weimar would permit. Everything that care and accessories could do was done to make the design of the piece understood. Liszt saw what was wanted at once, and did it. Success was his reward; and with this success he now approaches me, saying, 'Behold, we have come thus far; now create us a new work, that we may go farther.'"

The music-drama of Lohengrin was, as this letter prophesied, first performed in 1850 at Weimar under the leadership of Liszt. Wagner was not permitted to hear it at that time. It produced a remarkable impression on the small audience of musical and literary people from all parts of Europe whom Liszt had invited to be present. "From the memorable night of the first performance," it is conceded, "dates the success of the Wagner movement in Germany." During the next nine years the opera was given in fourteen different cities, and Wagner, who was still in political exile, is reported to have remarked sadly, "Soon I shall be the only German who has not heard Lohen-

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word** grin." It was in 1861, eleven years after its first performance, that he finally heard it in Vienna.

It is also most interesting to remember that it was this opera that won for Wagner not only lasting fame, but also the enthusiastic admiration of the young Ludwig of Bavaria. "Such," says Guerber, "was the impression this work made upon the young prince, who first heard it when he was only sixteen, that he resolved to do all in his power to help the composer. Three years later he succeeded to the throne of Bavaria as Ludwig II, and one of the first independent acts of his reign was to send a messenger to invite the master to come and dwell at his court, and to assure him a yearly pension from his private purse. The young king was so infatuated with the story of Lohengrin that he not only had his residence decorated with paintings and statues representing different episodes of the opera, but used also to sail about his lake, dressed in the Swan Knight's costume, in a boat drawn by ingeniously contrived mechanical swans." He also named two of his magnificent castles for the swan,—Hohenschwangau and Neuschwanstein.

The time of the drama is supposed to be in the early part of the tenth century, during the reign of the German king Henry I, who was born in Saxony in 876, and died in 936. He succeeded his father Otto in 912, not only as duke of Saxony, but also as lord of Thuringia and part of Franconia, and a little later of Lotharingia and the rest of Germany. Germany was much

annoyed by the savage Hungarians on its east border. In 922 a nine years' truce was effected by an annual tribute. Henry now built strong cities throughout Saxony and Thuringia in place of the small villages in which they had been accustomed to live, as described in the *Germania* of Tacitus. He also taught the Germans to fight on horseback, as was the Hungarian practice. By the time the truce was ended, the Germans were prepared to meet their enemies, which they did so successfully that the Hungarians never annoyed them again. Henry I, surnamed the Fowler, is esteemed "one of the wisest and most energetic of the German kings. His reign marks an epoch of the highest importance in early medieval history." Brabant was an ancient and extensive duchy in the Netherlands. The largest part of Brabant is now in Belgium, and includes the region of Antwerp and Brussels. The counts of Brabant later took the title of dukes. The court of Brabant was early famous for art, learning and literature.

The Lohengrin legend is said to have originated in the town of Cleves in Germany. There stands an ancient Castle of the Swan, high on the hilltop in the centre of the town. A splendid statue of Lohengrin, Knight of the Swan, adorns the market place. As far as I could learn, on a recent visit there, the old traditions of the place were indigenous and most ancient, although some of them are also told of the small town of Nymwegen as well as of the Duchy of Cleves. These traditions are told in numerous

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word** famous poems. Wagner has taken considerable liberties with the old legends, but has made a notable composite version which, wedded to the genius of his music, will probably remain for all time as the most widely accepted form of the legend.

The Lohengrin story was in the last one hundred lines of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. A slight story — but Wagner gathered other versions of this great national myth and blended a new narrative to suit his dramatic purposes. Thus he used *Lohengrin*, a poem by an unknown Bavarian poet; *Der Jüngere Titurel*, a poem by Albrecht von Scharfenberg, giving some account of the Holy Grail and *Lohengrin*; *Der Schwanen-Ritter*, by Konrad von Würzburg, a poem dating from the latter half of the thirteenth century; and the popular form of the legends in the *Deutsche Sagen*. In the first part of the story, Wagner follows his sources rather closely, and most ingeniously; the second part is largely the creation of Wagner's own dramatic genius; in the last part he again goes back to the original materials, with some variations. But in it all Wagner selects and re-arranges with a masterly dramatic genius and a fine appreciation of the poetic possibilities of the story.

The version here presented is intended as a companion volume to the *Parsifal*, by the same translator, issued in similar form two years ago. That volume seemed to meet such a real need, and has had such a continuous demand, running through repeated editions, that the

publishers felt that a similar literary treatment of Lohengrin might be acceptable. It is a version for the general reader. It is not a libretto for the music. It gives a cumulative impression, the composite effect of words, scenery, action, and, it is hoped, the spirit of the musical interpretation. Of course this is actually an impossible task, but an approximation may be made by beauty of description, the music of poetic speech, and the loftiness and majesty of the interpretative atmosphere. What is therefore attempted in this translation is to give the spirit of the original text in a free version rather than in a strictly literal one. It is taken out of its drama form, and put into the narrative form. The varied metres of the original are discarded and the story told in blank verse. All of the original German text, which is merely a succession of recitatives, arias, duets and choruses, has been used and faithfully translated, but there has also been added between these speeches such description of the scenery or of the action as seemed necessary to make the picture complete, and to give atmosphere to the story. I have made the scenic descriptions from renditions of Lohengrin which I have witnessed in Berlin, Munich and other musical centres.

In Lohengrin, we are constantly reminded of Shakespeare's Macbeth. Telramund is "infirm of purpose" like Macbeth, but urged on and mastered by his wife's ambition. And Ortrud, like Lady Macbeth, has desperate daring, quenchless ambition, and the fierce nerve of

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an unsexed womanhood. There are also many startling resemblances between certain features in Lohengrin and Die Fliegende Holländer. But most striking are the resemblances in Lohengrin and Parsifal. Parsifal repeats some strains of the swan-music of Lohengrin. In both appear the swan and also the dove of the Holy Grail. In both the story of Monsalvat is told, but much more briefly in Lohengrin. In both there is a conflict between the old heathen religions and the new religion of Christianity. Ortrud is a follower of the old gods Thor and Odin. In both there is something of the old superstitions and magic of the Middle Ages. In Lohengrin we see the transformation of a boy to a swan; the mystic boat drawn by a swan, and later by a dove. In Parsifal we see the transformation of Kundry in her various characters; and the appearance and disappearance of the magic garden with its flower maidens. The evil-hearted, magic-working Ortrud of the Lohengrin is separated in the Parsifal into the characters, Kundry and Klingsor.

As to character studies, we may say that in this story of Lohengrin, Wagner has portrayed with consummate art two types of women. Elsa is the type of woman with perfect love. She can trust love, she can dare for love, she believes in love with all her heart. She is the complete embodiment of the idealism and heroism of love. The character of Elsa, her dreamy nature, her absolute trust in God, her unresisting attitude before her accusers, was probably suggested by the slight picture in Wolfram

von Eschenbach, but Wagner has elaborated it finely. In the dark Ortrud, the wife of Frederick of Telramund, the claimant to the throne, Wagner has portrayed another type of woman, — “the woman without love.” She is, as Wagner says, that “horrible thing, a politic, scheming woman. She has but one passion, — an ancestral pride; and to gratify this, she would sacrifice all.” Ortrud is a mingling of a malignant woman and pagan sorceress. She does the work attributed in the old legends to the wicked Duchess of Cleves. The nature of Ortrud is best seen, says Wagner, “when she rises from the steps of the cathedral and invokes her old long-forgotten gods. She thinks only of the old, and hates everything new. She is terribly grand in her ancestral pride and murderous fanaticism.” The character of Telramund is entirely Wagner’s creation, without help from the old legends. Of the character of Lohengrin Wagner has given this analysis: “Lohengrin sought the woman who believed in him; who should not ask who he was, nor whence he came, but should love him as he was, and because he was what he appeared to her to be. He sought the woman to whom he should not have to account for himself, to justify himself, but who should unconditionally love him.” The tragedy in the story of Lohengrin comes when the evil and scheming Ortrud attacks Elsa in the weakness of her strength, in insinuating that she ought to know the past of her heroic lover. Elsa is so strong in possession, she feels so absolutely sure of her hero,

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she has so loved him, that she feels she must know all about him; his whole past, his whole future, belong to her. She is so confident of him and of their great love that she dares to disobey him and ask the fatal question.

For those who care to see the deeper and higher meanings in such a drama as *Lohengrin*, these suggestions may be offered. The story is the eternal myth of *Psyche*, a story antedating Christianity, a study of woman's heart. Absolute confidence, resting not upon outward facts, but upon inward persuasion, is presented as the necessary condition of love. The happiness of lovers depends, as it were, upon an inner psychic condition,—the perfect union of souls. Wonderfully interpretative also is the significant music. The music of *Lohengrin* has a mystic and magical quality. It is full of spiritual aspiration. There is a loftiness and unworldliness about it. But it is full also of the sweetness of human love. And it is dark at times with the insinuations of evil and the sounds of warning. "The whole interest of *Lohengrin*," wrote Wagner, "lies in an inner process within Elsa's heart, touching the secret springs of the soul." And this he tried to express in his music. Music is feeling and revelation. "The music," as W. J. Henderson says, "is the utterance of soul; the melody, the spontaneous embodiment of feeling. An approach to the endless melody of the later dramas, the *Lohengrin* music is mellifluous and wonderfully attractive, but perhaps even Wagner felt that in it his own beautiful conception of the

character of Lohengrin was not fully revealed to the public."

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But yet further in Lohengrin, as in Tannhäuser, and supremely in Parsifal, there seems to be symbolized the tragic self-sacrifice of love. As Wagner himself writes, "if any characteristic poetic feature is expressed in them, it is the high tragedy of renunciation, that which alone avails." This may be the shadow of Schopenhauer's pale philosophy; yet even before his acquaintance with Schopenhauer, Wagner had the same convictions. Tannhäuser had meant to him the struggle of a man's heart, the conquest of life, the sacrifice of the wild pleasures of the world for the sweet delights of a pure ideal and a satisfied conscience. Wagner, however, felt that in Lohengrin he was rising high into ethereal regions, toward the radiant summits. He was irresistibly drawn to it. He writes: "Lohengrin is an entirely new manifestation. It appears to me as an imperative duty."

The magic elements in the Lohengrin remind us that life is not all commonplace and prosaic, if we have only eyes to see. The mystic atmosphere is a picture of daily life as a poet and seer may behold it, with the glamour of the divine upon it, and the light that never was on sea or land. Is there not something of mystery and magic in every life? We may not see in life such transformations as in Lohengrin, but we may see the transformations of heart and soul by the magic of the divine power.

Finally, there is this tremendous spiritual suggestion in the drama — as great a truth as that

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in Parsifal. The spiritual purpose of the latter was to show the healing power of redemptive love, while Lohengrin shows the absolute necessity of an unquestioning faith in order to fullness of blessing. This truth has its earthly aspects. Doubt destroys the perfectness of human happiness. A thousand daily experiences witness to the fact. But especially is this true in its religious aspect. The divine Helper comes to our aid. We are delivered out of great distresses. He gives Himself to us in love. He gives the fulness of His blessing. All is right so long as we perfectly love and trust Him. But begin to doubt God, begin to ask His name and question His nature, and God is soon forever lost to us. Faith is the most necessary thing in daily life, as it is the most necessary in divine life. Perfect love and perfect trust are the essence of religion, and the only source of heavenly joy. Fear hath torment, but perfect love casteth out fear.

This central truth of the drama of Lohengrin is universal, and touches all religions and all life. It shows the desolation of doubt. It is an appeal for the highest faith in the highest things. Indeed, a motto for this drama might be, "Das sich uns nur durch Glauben giebt." ("That which we attain only through faith.") May we not say, therefore, that, both in beauty and significance, this noble drama of Lohengrin belongs to the undying creations, an inspired vision, an immortal master-work, to which as yet the world has scarcely awakened?

OLIVER HUCKEL

June, 1905

LOHENGRIN. PART I

THE MYSTIC CHAMPION



BENEATH the huge and gloomy
judgment-oak,
Gaunt, gnarled and twisted with
the centuries,

Lifting its shaggy head and out-
stretched arms,

Like some weird prophet of the day of doom,
Above the Antwerp meadows flowery-fair,
King Henry sat. Full many a deed of blood
Had been avenged beneath that judgment-oak,
And immemorial wrongs. Nobles and kings
Had pleaded there the cause of might and
right,—

There in the open court of arching sky,
Within the holy hearing of high Heaven.
Across the fair broad meadows, billowy deep
With flowers and sedges, wound the silver
stream

Of gently-flowing Scheldt. The molten silver
danced

With serpent sunshine, seen and hid anon
In tortuous windings to the ancient town
Of high-built gables and tall, clustering spires,
Of mart and craft and art, famed far and wide,
Of stalwart warriors and of winsome wives,—
Antwerp, the pride and boast of all Brabant.

King Henry saw no meadows fair with flowers,
No silver sunshine shone upon his face,
But darkness. Shadows of the judgment-oak
Made his brow gloom, and dark and stern his
eye.

Long journeying from the far imperial court

**The
Mystic
Champion**

With eager gladness had he come to ask
Their hearts and swords for service in the war
Against the ravage of Hungarian hordes.
His liegemen of Brabant had been his boast
For fierce and loyal valor in his wars.
But now Brabant was torn with inner strife;
Its chieftain, the young prince, was lost or dead;
The breath of scandal tainted all the air:
Treason was whispered. So King Henry sat
Under the judgment-oak to hear the cause,
To root out scandal and avenge the wrong,
And bring fair peace once more to dear Brabant.

Majestic was the King; regal in form
And feature; warlike and yet rich his garb
With steel and gold; his flowing hair and beard
Crowned with his eagle-helmet, and his sword,
Held like a sceptre in his sinewy hands,
An arbiter of justice or of war.
His Saxon warriors, clad in steel and fur,
Stood at his side, clanging their mighty swords.
Brave comrades had they been in journeyings
far

To every people of the German realm;
Had fought for him in full a hundred fights,
And loved him as a brother and their King.
Kind was his heart, a lover of the chase,
A lover of all pleasant sports and deeds.
Henry the Fowler was the loving name
The people named him. But they also knew
His lion courage and his mighty wrath,
His fierce tumultuous prowess in the days
When bugles call to battle, and the foe

Assails the German honor, German rights,
In any part of Germany's domain.
He was the King, the people were his trust,
To guard and love with his own life and blood.

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Mystic
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Before him now, there gathered in a throng—
For he had called them to the judgment-oak—
The counts and nobles of his fair Brabant,
A stalwart company, but sad of heart,
Bewildered, troubled by the mystery
That lay upon their fair realm like the mist
That creeps at times along the winding
Scheldt,—

A silent, stealthy wraith from out the sea,
And hugs the fair land with its chilling gloom.
So they stood there distraught before the King,
Yet eager for his judgment. He would be
The blazing sun to drive away all fog.
And foremost of the nobles of Brabant
Was Frederick of Telramund, renowned
For valorous sword in many hard-fought wars,
He that had married Ortrud, haughty, proud,
Already old in cunning and deceit,—
The dark-eyed daughter of a Friesland prince.

Slow rose the King. The judgment was begun.
Four royal trumpeters sent forth a blast
To call for silence at the King's behest,
And forth there stepped a herald from the
King,
And cried a summons to the royal word:
"Hark! counts and nobles, freemen of Brabant!
Henry, our German sovereign, cometh here
To parley with you on affairs of state.

Will you give honor to his word and will?"
And all the people cried in loud acclaim:
"We will give honor to his word and will.
Welcome, King Henry, welcome to Brabant!"

Then spake the King with gracious warmth of
word:

"God bless you, my dear vassals of Brabant!
Not lightly have I come to your fair realm,
But with sad warnings of our kingdom's plight.
Need I rehearse the tales how tides of woe
Often have swept our land from the dread East?
On far frontiers the wives and children pray:
'O God, protect us from the Hun's fierce wrath!'
And mine the duty as the nation's head
To end this time of shame and tyranny.
At last, by force of arms I gained a truce,—
Nine peaceful years, and used them for defence,
Built fortresses and citadels and walls,
And summoned every man to bear a hand.
The truce is ended; now the foe is wroth,
For we refuse the tribute he demands.
Therefore, 't is time to guard our nation's weal!
From east to west, let every German rise!
Assemble, faithful thralls! United stand!
No more shall foe insult our German land!"

Then cried the Saxons and Thuringians,
Striking their arms with fierce resounding
blows:

"God help us to defend our German land!"

Seating himself, the King continued speech:
"Thus did I come, my people of Brabant,

To summon you to Mayence, 'neath my flag.
But to my shame, how do I find you here?
Rent by sad quarrels, and without a prince,—
With harsh and angry voices am I stunned.
Therefore come near, Frederick of Telramund,
I know thee for a knight as brave as true.
Speak! tell me all the reason for this strife!"

And noble Telramund, count of Brabant,
Came forward at the summons. And he spake:
"Thank God, my King, that thou art here to
judge.

For truth I speak and falsehood I disdain.
Now hear my story and the very truth.
When our late valiant Duke came to his death
He made me guardian of his lonely children,
Elsa the maiden and her brother Godfrey,
Whose dawning years with faithfulness I
guided,
Whose welfare was the touchstone of mine
honor.

Mark then, my Sovereign, what a pang was
mine

When of mine honor's treasure I was robbed.
One day they wandered careless in the woods,
But home she trembling came without the boy;
With well-feigned sorrow ran to us for tidings,
Pretending he had wandered by mischance,
And no trace of his footsteps could she find.
And fruitless also was our search for him.
Then questioned I this Elsa with stern words,
And her pale face and faltering words betrayed
her—

All eyes beheld her horrid crime confessed.

**The
Mystic
Champion**

Straightway I felt a loathing towards the maid,
And willingly did I renounce the right
The Duke had given me, to claim her hand.
I chose a bride more pleasing to my thought,
A daughter of great Radbod, Friesland's prince,
A dark-eyed daughter, Princess Ortrud called.
And now it is my duty to arraign
This Elsa, guilty princess of Brabant.
I charge her with her only brother's death.
Further, I claim dominion o'er this realm
As nearest kinsman of the valiant Duke,
And also in the name of my true wife,
Descendant of the ancient race of kings
Who ruled this land for many ages past.
This is my cause. Judge it, O King, aright!"
And as he spake, Ortrud, as if a queen,
Arose and stood by him. Upon her brow
The sparkling coronet of fair Brabant;
Within her eyes, a subtle tigress gleam.

Then all the people cried with horror stricken:
"What awful words are these, O Telramund!
Thou fillest all our hearts with dread dismay!"
And full of doubt and pain, up-spake the King:
"A fearful accusation thou hast brought!
Who can believe a crime so dark and foul?"

But Frederick answered with another charge:
"O King, this maid who long before this crime
Had haughty been, and scornfully refused
My proffered hand, is full of listless dreams.
I know she cherishes some guilty love.
She thought perchance, her brother lost and
dead,

And she the sovereign queen of all Brabant,
That I, her faithful vassal, could be scorned
While she espoused some false and guilty
lover."

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Mystic
Champion**

Then without further parley or response,
But eager to do justice and bring peace,
The good King called: "Let the accused ap-
pear!

Forthwith begin the just and solemn trial!
God grant me wisdom to see truth and right!"
Gravely he hung his shield upon the oak,
Renewing the dread court of life and death
Around the gnarled and ancient judgment-
seat;

Fiercely the Saxons thrust their shining swords
Into the earth, and made a circle round;
While the Brabantine warriors drew their
swords

And laid them flat upon the mossy ground;
Then came the royal herald and proclaimed:
"Hearken, ye people, to the King's commands!
Dost thou decree, O King, to give thy judg-
ment here?"

And the King answered: "Never will I bear
This shield again until I know the truth,
And judgment has been spoken for the right."
And the strong warriors shouted with one
voice:

"No sword of ours shall find its sheath again
Until the King has given judgment here."

And full again the herald's voice proclaimed:
"Here where ye now behold the King's own
shield

**The
Mystic
Champion**

Shall trial be held and judgment true be given!
Heed ye the summons in the King's own name:
I summon Princess Elsa for her trial!"

Scarce had his summons died upon the air
When the fair princess Elsa was in sight,—
A dawning vision of pure loveliness,
A gentle maiden, winsome in sweet grace,
Arrayed in simple robe of virgin white;
Tall, stately, noble in her every mien;
A royal candor in her deep blue eyes,
Wet with a sorrowing love and innocence;
Uncrowned and humbled, yet a princess still,—
A regal splendor in her wealth of hair,
An aureole of shimmering, flowing gold.
Slowly she walked, and halted far away
From that dread circle of the judgment-oak;
Nor raised her eyes, nor seemed to understand
The dreadful crime that lay upon her name.
She walked in dreams, a noble saintlike form
Among the ladies fair attending her.
The people whispered: "See, she comes, fair
Elsa!

As sweet and pure as angel fresh from heaven.
He who has put upon her base suspicion—
Can he have ground for these accusing words,
And can he ever prove his dark charge true?"

Then asked the King: "Art thou the Princess
Elsa,
And art thou willing I should judge thy cause?
And, ask I further, dost thou know the charge
That dark and heavy is against thy name?"
And Elsa nodded with sad, drooping head,

For she had heard these dreadful rumors rife
Which Frederick had hinted far and wide,
And Ortrud's evil tongue had whispered oft.
Yea, she knew well these charges that he
brought.

Again the King: "What answer canst thou
give?"

And Elsa shook her head, as if no word,
No answer had she, nothing for the King.
Till in astonishment the King exclaimed:
"Art thou admitting thus thine awful guilt?"
Yet Elsa only murmured: "My poor brother!"
Then all the people were in strange dismay,
And looked at her and were in doubt, and cried:
"T is wondrous strange! What meaneth such
demeanor!"

Then said the King again with kindly voice:
"Speak, Elsa, wilt thou not confide in me?"

The people waited in expectant awe
While Elsa seemed to gaze in quiet dream
Seeing a vision as she slowly spake,
Chanting a dream that late had come to her,—
Her words as full of music as a song,
A tender maiden's chaste and holy prayer,
And glowing fervid with a poet's fire:

OFTEN in sorrow kneeling,
Unto high Heaven I prayed;
My inmost soul revealing,
Imploring God for aid.
I prayed in tears and sighing,
And from my heart one cry
Through all the air went sighing,

**The
Mystic
Champion**

And reached the heavenly sky.
I heard its echoes pealing,
Far off they seemed to cease;
Then sleep came gently stealing,
And bathed my soul with peace."

And as she spake the people cried again:
"How wonderful! She dreams! Is she en-
tranced?"

And Henry cried, for here he saw a clue,
"Elsa, defend thyself before thy judge!"
But on her face was confidence and joy,
A holy rapture, as she told her dream:

"Arrayed in shining splendor,
A noble knight I saw;
His look sublime and tender
Filled all my soul with awe.
A golden horn beside him,
He leaned upon his sword;
And as mine eyes espied him,
On clouds of light he soared.
His words so low and tender
Brought life renewed to me.
My guardian, my defender,
Thou shalt my champion be!"

And all the people cried in earnest prayer:
"Be merciful, O Heaven, guard the right,
Make clear the truth, and show where lies the
guilt!"

And Henry spake, with spirit deep disturbed:
"O Frederick, thou art a man of honor,
Bethink thee well of thy vile accusation!
Dost thou repent of bringing this dark charge?"

But Frederick, relentless, answered him:
"List ye, she raves about her lover now.
Her dreams and fancies cannot me deceive,—
Of all I charge I have the fullest proof,
True witness to attest the very deed.
Yet if ye doubt my word as noble knight,
What use of further witnesses or proof?
Here stand I with my honor and my sword,—
Who dares to doubt the word that I have given,
Let him stand forth and fight, and prove the
truth!"

Then shouted the Brabantine nobles all:
"Not one of us! We only fight for thee!"
And Frederick appealed then to the King:
"And thou, my King! Recall my faithful service
That day I saved thee from the savage Dane."
But quickly, kindly, answered the good King:
"Never need I reminder of that deed,—
Firm is my faith in thy unsullied word;
Nor could I wish for all this noble land
A truer guardian than thy noble self.
'T is God alone shall judge between you now!"
Then all cried out: "'T is well! 't is well!
Let God be judge! Let Heaven decide the
cause!"

And in the sign of that appeal to Heaven,
The King drew forth his sword, and thrust it
firm
Into the ground. Now was the issue joined.
Then asked the King the formal questionings:
"I ask thee, Frederick of Telramund,
Wilt thou, by combat here for life or death,

**The
Mystic
Champion**

Allow high Heaven to decide this cause?"
And Frederick with a loud voice answered,
"Yea!"

Then spake the King to Elsa, lonely heart:
"And now I ask thee, Elsa of Brabant,
Dost thou consent to Heaven's ordeal here?
To take what champion high Heaven may send,
And let the fight decide for life or death?"
And Elsa answered, "Yea, I do consent."
"Who then thy champion?" inquired the King.
And Frederick muttered in a taunting tone:
"Now shall we hear her guilty lover's name."
And all the people cried, "Yea, let us hear!"
But Elsa, looking upward, cried to Heaven:
"That noble knight who in my dream appeared
Shall be my champion for evermore!
And when God sends him gladly will I yield
The royal crown o'er all this goodly land;
And gladly also give him with the crown
The wealth and lands my father gave to me;
And gladly shall he have, if he desire,
The crown of love, my honor and my life."
And with amazement all the people cried:
"Hark ye! What noble prize! God give His
grace:
He who contends for these, must noble be!"

Then spake the King with ringing voice and
loud:
"The sun stands high, the midday has arrived:
Send out the summons, send it far and near;
Call forth the warrior knights with trumpet
calls."
Forward the herald came with trumpeters, —

The
Mystic
Champion

One for each corner — north, south, east and west, —

And at a sign they blew their mighty blasts,
A summons and a challenge to the fight.

And after each strong blast, the herald cried:

“He who will battle here to life or death

For Elsa of Brabant, let him appear!”

But none appeared, and all the people cried:

“No champion answers to the challenge call.

Alas, poor maiden, hapless is thy cause!”

And Frederick, with a taunting gladness, said:

“Behold now, whether I spake false or not!

See, on my side stand both the truth and right!”

But Elsa spake in piteous appeal:

“My gracious sovereign, let me now implore

One further summons to my champion, —

He dwells afar, perchance he hath not heard.”

Then gave the King command: “Yea, once again

Give forth the challenge to the warrior knights!”

Once more the trumpets called to all the world;

Once more the herald shouted forth the words:

“He who will battle here to life or death

For Elsa of Brabant, let him appear!”

But still no champion appeared for her;

And all the people said with awe-struck voice:

“By awful silence God gives judgment here!”

But Elsa and her women knelt in prayer,

And Elsa cried: “O God, thou heardst my plea,

And showed me once my dauntless champion!

Speak to him now again, O God, and haste

My true knight's coming. Help me now!

As in my dream he once appeared to me,

**The
Mystic
Champion**

So let him come in panoply of Heaven!"
And all the women wrung their hands and
prayed:
"Grant her thy gracious aid, O Lord of heaven!
Hear her and hear us in our earnest prayers!"

And as they prayed, a sound of shouting rose, —
A sound of wonder and of great amaze,
For some strange sight the people seemed to see
Afar upon the river. And they cried:
"Behold! behold! A wonder beyond words, —
A shimmering skiff drawn by a snow-white
swan, —
And lo! a noble knight stands in the prow!
How splendid shines his armor, silver bright;
A helm of light resplendent on his brow!
Behold! how rapidly his boat draws near!
See! with a golden chain he guides the swan!
Behold, he comes! Behold, the champion
comes!"

And all the people hurried to the shore
To give their welcome to the shining knight.
The good King raised himself in silent awe,
While Frederick was stricken dumb with fear,
And dark-eyed Ortrud cowered at his side.
But Elsa stood all silent with surprise —
A happy gratitude upon her face,
That God had granted her His gracious aid.

And now the swan-drawn skiff has reached
the bank,
And now the noble knight is near at hand.
His gleaming silver armor, shining helm,

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Mystic
Champion

His shield upon his shoulder, golden horn
Upon his side, the splendid glittering sword
On which he leans, — all speak a princely rank,
A dauntless courage, and a noble heart.

Upon his helmet carven with strange art
A tiny swan with shining outstretched wings;
Upon his silver shield a pictured swan;
And from his shoulders hung a flowing cloak
Of color clear and azure as the sky;
Powerful and tall he stood with sinewy hands
That even in their gauntlets showed their
might;

Deep golden was his hair and beard; his brow
Was broad; his eyes far-seeing, deep and dark;
Clear wisdom shone in them, and all his face
Was lighted by a brightness wondrous fair.

The people bow their heads in deference;
And Elsa, turning round to see her knight,
Uttered a cry of joy, for it is he
Whom God had shown to her in loving dreams.
And all the people cried with loudest voice:
“A miracle of Heaven! God be praised!
Oh, wonder, marvel, never seen before!
All praise to God, who saves the innocent!
All hail, most noble knight, God's champion!”

But now the knight is speaking to his swan:
“I give thee thanks, my faithful, gentle swan.
Turn thee again, and breast the broadening
tide

That leads thee to the happy land of dawn,
Where joyous hearts for evermore abide.
Thy task appointed has been duly done.
Farewell, my faithful, gentle swan, farewell.”

The
Mystic
Champion

Then slowly down the stream the snow-white
 swan
With softest plumage and proud, crested neck
Floated, the white skiff following, fairy craft,—
It seemed a vision from some wondrous land
Beyond the sunset and the silvery sea!
Then all the people cried in reverent awe:
“A mystic glory streams upon us here,—
A mystic power enthralling every heart!
How wondrously are grace and valor blended
In him whom God hath sent by miracle!”

At last the knight looked toward the judgment-
 oak,
Made deep obeisance to the King, and spake:
“Hail, gracious sovereign! Victory be thine!
God ever honor thy most valorous sword!
And may thy name in this land and all lands
Be long remembered, great and glorious!”
And graciously in turn the King replied:
“My thanks to thee! Right well I know the
 power
That sent thee to us in our dire distress!
High Heaven hath sent thee for this crucial
 hour.”
Thereat the fair swan-knight spake to the King:
“I come as champion for yon gentle maid,—
To clear her name from foul suspicion’s blight.
I come to battle for her sacred rights,
If she accept my proffered knightly vows.
Fair Elsa of Brabant, I ask thee now
If thou wilt grant me leave to fight for thee?
If thou wilt choose me champion of thy rights,
And fearless trust me to the life or death?”

The
Mystic
Champion

Then Elsa, who in spellbound silence stood,
Since her fair dream had brought this noblest
knight,

Came to him, knelt in reverence, and spake:

"My hope, my hero, and my champion!

My brave preserver! heavenly knight divine,

Do thou protect me! All I have is thine!"

And quickly with a look of love he asked:

"If Heaven grant me victory in the fight,

Wilt thou give love to me, — and be my bride?"

And Elsa answered: "As I kneel to thee,

So surely am I thine for evermore!"

Yet further spake the noble mystic knight:

"Fair Elsa, if thy troth thou plightest me,

And if I save this land from plotting foes,

And if our lives united shall remain, —

One solemn promise must I have from thee:

Promise thou wilt not ask me whence I came!

Promise thou wilt not ask my name or race!

Promise to take me thus for love's own sake!"

And Elsa answered: "I do promise thee.

For love's own sake I take thee, at thy word."

Then spake the knight again in measured
tones:

"Dear Elsa, dost thou understand me well?

This thou dost promise, as thou lovest me, —

Never to ask my name or whence I came,

Never to seek to guess or know my race,

But just to take me as a gift of Heaven."

And Elsa said again with loving heart:

"My shield, my hero, my defender true,

Whose faith in me is so sublime and strong,

I give thee perfect trust, my life's devotion.

How could I question what high Heavens sends?

The
Mystic
Champion

As thou defendest me in my distress,
So hold I sacred all thy dear commands."
Then with the rapture of a glowing trust
The noble knight came to her, took her hand,
And clasped her in devotion to his breast,
And cried: "Dear Elsa, thou shalt be my bride.
I worship thee, I love thee with my life!"

While those who witnessed marvelled, each to
each:

"O miracle of love before our eyes!
What fair enchantment, wondrous, wondrous
love!
Deep in our hearts we feel its mystic spell,
As all around them plays the light divine!"

Then Elsa's champion stood forth and spake:
"Hear now, ye freemen of this noble land,
Guiltless and true is Elsa of Brabant!
More innocent no angel in high heaven.
And thou, Count Telramund, I speak to thee,—
Thy charge is false, and false and vile thy
heart,
As God's quick judgment shall reveal to all."
And the Brabantine nobles pleaded then:
"Count Frederick! forego the fight. 'Tis vain!
What canst thou win but woe in such a strife?
If Heaven has sent him as a champion here,
What can avail thine arm or sturdy sword?
Forego the fight! We plead with thee as friends!
God speaks in him, and would you fight high
Heaven?"

But Frederick in hate and anger cried,—
For all his heart was poisoned by the guile

Of his wife Ortrud's dark, malignant words,
And doubly angered by fair Elsa's scorn:
"Sooner than yield, I die with sword in hand.
Whatever sorcery has brought thee here,
Know well, thou stranger, that I fear thee not!
Thy threat can wake no terror in my heart!
For what I spake is true, my charge is true,
And I accept thy challenge to the fight,
And God, I know, shall give me victory!"

Then spake the mystic champion to the King:
"Great sovereign, now ordain the battle rights."
And Henry said: "Let three knights for each
side

Mark off the field of honor and of strife,
And this do I proclaim the battle-ground."
So three Brabantine nobles forward came
And measured off the ground for Frederick,
And three strong Saxons for the mystic knight
Did likewise, thrusting spears into the ground.
Then cried the herald: "Hark, and mark me
well!

No man shall seek to quell this sacred strife!
No man shall come within the royal bounds!
And he who dares to disobey this word,
If freeman, forfeiteth his strong right hand;
If serf, shall pay the forfeit with his life!"
And all the men repeated in slow tones:
"If freeman, forfeiteth his strong right hand;
If serf, shall pay the forfeit with his life."
And once again the herald's voice was heard:
"Mark me, contestants for the truth and right!
Preserve the laws of combat frank and fair,
Use no enchantment, use no crafty arts,

**The
Mystic
Champion**

Let manly honor be your strength and skill;
Trust not yourselves, but rather trust in God,
And may high Heaven make its true decree."
Then Frederick and the mystic champion cried:
"We trust no might of ours, but God alone,—
Now let high Heaven give its just decree!"

Slowly the King advanced and spake in prayer:
"O King of Kings, hear my petition true!
Look down upon this combat for the right;
Let the pure sword declare thy sovereign will;
Let truth shine forth and falsehood be accurst;
Add strength and valor to the true man's arms;
Whoso is false, let weakness be the sign.
Give judgment, mighty God, by this dread strife,
For human wisdom is but weak and vain."
And all the people murmured the same prayer:
"Let strength and valor aid the true man's
arms;

Whoso is false, let weakness be the sign.
Give judgment, mighty God, by this dread strife,
For human wisdom is but weak and vain."
Then Elsa and her mystic champion prayed:
"Yea, Lord, make known thy judgment just
and true.

We have no fear. Our trust is all in Thee."
And all the ladies made this fervent prayer:
"O gracious Lord, bless now thine own true
knight!"

But evil Ortrud muttered in her wrath:
"Trust whom ye will. My arts shall win the
day, —

I trust to Frederick and the secret powers.
I trust the strong right arm and sturdy sword

That never knew defeat, nor shall they now."
And Frederick uttered reckless blasphemy:
"Yea, Heaven, give thy judgment. Here am I!
For God and honor!—thus do I defy!"

The
Mythic
Champion

The herald signalled and the trumpets' blast
Called for the battle royal. At the spears
Stood six strong warriors marking well the field,
And witnessing the justness of the fight.
Around in wider circle stood the throng
Of knights and nobles, yeomanry and serfs.
And in a fair group, near the judgment-oak,
Beneath the King's protection, Elsa stood
With all her ladies. Hearts were beating high,
On every face expectancy and awe.
Quick from the ground the King drew forth
his sword,—
Thrice on his shield he struck resounding blows.
And at the first, the champions of the fray
Came forward, bowed and stepped into the lists.
The second stroke, and they advanced their
shields;
Each from its scabbard drew his trusty sword.
The third stroke, and they fought. How fierce
the fight!
What skill and strength, what music of the
blades!
What cuts and thrusts, what flashing, glitter-
ing steel!
What blows and lunges, strokes and counter-
strokes!
While every heart in that great multitude
Watched eagerly and trembled for the fate.
Fair Elsa held her breath, and constant prayed.

**The
Mystic
Champion**

And Henry saw with wonder growing great
That fierce and wondrous play of gleaming
swords.

Hotter the contest grew, like lightning flash
Or thunderous rain of heavy blow on blow.
Till one great stroke the mystic champion gave
So sure, so clear, so mighty and superb
That down fell Frederick fainting to the earth;
A moment tried to rise, staggered a step,
Fell backward, and lay prostrate on the ground.
Thereat the victor, with his sword's keen point
Upon the throat of Frederick, spake out:
"Traitor, thy life is mine by Heaven's will!
Yet do I spare it. Go, repent in peace!"

A shout of exultation now arose:
"Victory! victory! Heaven speaks its word!
All hail, all hail, our hero glorious!"
And Elsa, full of bliss and rapture, cried:
"My hero, my beloved, hear my praise!
The songs of angels sing within my heart!
I hold thee worthy of the highest love!
Yea, in thy sovereignty my soul delights,
My life would give itself to thee alone!
Wilt thou divinely bless me, take my love
And hold me to thy heart for evermore!"
Then answered her strong champion lovingly:
"O stainless maiden, 'twas thine own pure soul
That made the victory that God hath given;
And for thy many sorrow-laden days
God will give peace and overflowing joy!"
But in the shadow, Frederick muttered low:
"Woe, woe! for Heaven hath doomed me to de-
feat

And brought my trusted sword to direful
shame!

O earth! that some deep grave had covered
me

Ere all my fame and honor had been lost!"

And savage Ortrud hissed malignant hate:

"Not Heaven, but that foul sorcerer has won.

Who is he that hath brought my power to
naught?

Who is he that hath doomed us to disgrace,
And blasted all our hopes of noble fame?"

Meanwhile the people shouted joyfully,
Waving their hands and tossing high their
caps,—

The King exulting with the multitude:

"Hail, valiant hero! Heaven's glorious knight!

Uplift, ye minstrels, songs of victory!

Hail to thy quest! Hail to thine advent here!

Hail to thy might, defender of the weak!

Raise high our praises! Let the songs resound!

Never such peerless hero hath been known!

Let all the land reëcho with his praise,

And all the earth rejoice in happy song!

Righter of wrongs, deliverer from woe,

Preserver of the weak and innocent,

Blest be the hour that brought thee for our
need!

Praises to thee! All hail, most valiant knight!"

Now in the tumult of the people's shouts

A great despair had come to Frederick,

And in his shame he fell at Ortrud's feet.

While in new tumult and rejoicing love,

The
Mystic
Champion

The strong young warriors seized the champion,
Raised him aloft upon his mighty shield,
And lifting Elsa on the King's own shield,
Covered with all the royal cloth of gold,
They bore them off in happy triumphing,
The multitude in glad processional
Shouting and singing all their festive songs,
And praising God for mighty victory!

LOHENGRIN. PART II

THE WEDDING-DAY



HE night had fallen. Busy Antwerp
slept

In silence broken only by the stroke
Of quarter chimes from the cathedral spire

That rose aloft in lace-like airiness.

Dim in the shadows loomed the ponderous
towers

Of the great citadel. Gloomy was seen,
Yet scarce discerned in the nocturnal mists,
The stately royal palace where the knights
Sat at the banquet and dreamed noble dreams,
And made them true in daily hero-deeds;
And near by, walled and guarded with all care,
The Kemmenate, another palace home,
For princesses and ladies of the court.

And now the clouds have rifted, and the moon
Came forth in queenly beauty, scattering free
Her silver largess on the towers and domes
Of ancient Antwerp, conjuring her spell
Of subtle witchery on roofs and walls,
To make the mystic city of a dream.

But the fair dream was wakened by a curse.
Two wretched creatures haunted the dark
night,

Stole through the shadows of the narrow
streets,

And now had crouched on the cathedral steps, —
The Count of Telramund, in deep disgrace,
And with him wretched Ortrud. Both were clad
In vile and servile raiment. Fugitives were they,
And scorned of God and man. Dismal their
looks,

The
Wedding-
Day

Despairing, dark and sad. While festal lights
Were gleaming from the myriad-windowed
palace
And sounds of festal music filled the air.

By every scene, by music and the lights
Stirred to new anguish, Frederick rose and
spoke:

"Arouse thyself, companion of my shame!
The dawning day must not behold us here!"
But Ortrud: "Some strange spell enchains me
still.

Yon festive lights and music of our foes
Distils within my soul the deadly bane
That shall avenge and end our cruel wrongs."

Thereat a new remorse seized Frederick,
And muttering he answered bitterly:
"Unholy woman, what mysterious spell
Binds me to thee? Why can I never leave thee,
And fly to some far distant realm of peace,
Where troubled conscience might find rest
again?

'T is thou hast cost me all — my fame, my honor;
'T is thou hast lost me all my knighthood's pride
And doomed me to disgrace and utter shame.
Banished from hearth and home, my weapons
broken,
My shield and spear all stained, my sword
accurst,
My name abhorred, myself spurned by each
wretch
Whatever way I turn—oh, better death than
this!

Would God that I had died before this day!
My dearest honor lost in blackest shame!"

The
Wedding-
Day

But Ortrud broke in on his heavy woe,
And laughed in scorn and bitterness:

"Why dost thou thus consume thy heart in
grief?"

"This is my grief," he answered, in quick hate:

"I have no sword with which to strike thee
dead."

"Most gracious count," she spake in mockery,

"Well named thou art,—for thy fair name
means peace.

But wherefore hast thou lost thy faith in me?"

Then Frederick: "Thou askest why I doubt
thee?"

Was it not thy false story, thy dark craft,

That led me to accuse the innocent?

Didst thou not tell me thine own eyes had seen,

There in the forest from thy castle's tower,

This Elsa do the shameful deed of death,

Drowning her brother in the darksome pool?

Didst thou not lure my heart with prophecies,

All false, of Radbod's ancient house,—

How it should rise, and lord it in Brabant?

Didst thou not so beguile me with thy lies

That I renounced fair Elsa's spotless hand,

And wedded thee, the last and least of race?"

And Ortrud: "Oh, how galling are these
words!—

What I have said and proved is all too true!"

But Frederick with fiercer scorn spake on:

"Thou madest me whose name for honor stood,

The
Wedding-
Day

Whose life was one of virtue and renown,—
Thou madest me companion of thy lies,
Dupe and accomplice in thine infamies!"
But Ortrud cried: "Who lies? Who speaks to
me

Such accusation? Thinkest thou I lie?"
And Frederick, full of madness, bluntly spake:
"Yea, thou hast lied, and full of falsehood thou.
Behold God's judgment and behold thy heart, —
Because of thy black lies came my defeat."
She sneered: "God's judgment, dost thou say?"
And he: "Yea, God's own judgment, but the
words

Sound sinister and evil from thy lips."
Then she again with bold and sneering scorn:
"Yea, God's own judgment is for cowards,
then?"

But Frederick cried: "Ortrud, beware thy
words!"

And she with constant scorn: "What means
thy threat?

'T is like thee, coward, to threat a woman weak.
Hadst thou but menaced him with threat like
this,—

That foe that wrought us all our misery,—
Thou hadst won victory instead of shame.

Those who know how to fight with such as he
Will find him weaker than a newborn babe."

But Frederick: "Nay, nothing can avail.
Though he be weak, yet mighty is God's
power."

Then Ortrud laughed: "God's power! O fool
and blind!

Give me the chance, and quickly thou shalt see

How weak the God that seems to fight for him."
Thereat he answered her in doubt and fear:
"Thou wild and godless prophetess of evil,
Wouldst thou again by secret arts and craft
Allure my soul to deeper depths of shame?"

The Wedding- Day

But Ortrud turned and pointed, — for the lights
Had faded from the palace. All was still.
Then spake she: "Listen! now the revellers
Have ceased their music and are wooing sleep.
Come seat thyself by me. The hour is come
When yonder stars reveal their lore to me,
And I may show thee my prophetic soul.
Tell me, dost thou know yet who he may be,
This mystic knight, led hither by a swan?"
And Frederick: "Nay, I know not. Who is he?"

And with mysterious looks, she whispered low:
"What wouldst thou give to know the secret?"

Yea,
Mark me full well. For howsoe'er compelled,
Once he reveals his name, makes known his
race,
Straightway his proud and vaunted power is
lost,
The sorcery that gives him strength is gone."
Then Frederick: "Can this be true? Yea, now
I do recall his warning and her promise."
"Yea, listen further," crafty Ortrud said.
"No one hath power to draw the secret forth
But she to whom he gave such warning words
Never to question him nor seek to know."
And he in doubtful mood: "And dost thou mean
That Elsa can be tempted to forget

The
Wedding-
Day

And break her word, and loose this secret spell?"

Softly laughed Ortrud: "Ah, apt pupil mine!
How swift thou art to understand the drift!"

But Frederick: "How can this deed be done?"

Then Ortrud spake with cunning craft of power
And poured new hope within his craven heart:
"Mark me! Before all else we must not flee.

Nerve thee, and sharpen all thy cleverest wits.
We must awake in her suspicion deep

That he concealeth guilty mystery;

We must stand forth and 'gainst him make our
charge

That he used sorcery in that great fight,
And baffled God's just judgment by black
arts!"

And Frederick, catching all her vengeful mood,
Cried fervidly: "Yea, so it surely was!

'Twas fraud and sorcery that gained the fight."

While Ortrud added: "These means failing us,
We may attain our wished-for ends by force.

The black art's mystery is well known to me,
And all the secret lore of many climes.

Therefore, mark well what I shall tell to thee!
Know that when strength by magic art is lent,
If ever slightest wound is made on him

The charm is broken, and his strength is gone.

Yea, what I speak is true. In fight with him

Hadst thou but shed his blood, a single drop,

Or cleft from him a single finger joint,

Straightway he would have been within thy
power."

Then Frederick, stirred again to bitter strife,
A fierce ambition wakened, passionate
For quick revenge, up-rose and paced the
ground,

And answered her: "What great things thou
dost tell!

Methought this shame was Heaven's judgment
sent,

But now thou showest it was sorcery,
And justice' hand the easy dupe of fraud.
Would I might make revenge for all my shame;
Wipe out this cruel stain and foul disgrace;
Bring down this wretch to condemnation deep;
And win again mine honorable name.

Woman, who knowest darkness and its powers,
If thou speak false, then woe of woes for thee!"

But Ortrud quickly spake: "Nay, do not rage!
Temper thy wrath with reason, I beseech,
And I will teach thee vengeance, godlike joy!
O powers of dark revenge, I conjure you!
Arise within our hearts like stormy night.
Ye who now slumber, dreaming happy dreams,
Learn that fierce vengeance slumbers not nor
sleeps."

Scarce had they ceased when on the balcony
Of the great Kemmenate appeared a form
All clothed in white, more lustrous in the light
Of the white moon. The Princess Elsa stood,
Her fair hair flowing down in golden waves.
Over the parapet she leaned her head
Upon her fair white hand, and murmured forth
A moonlight reverie, a maiden's dream,
Her song into the loving ear of night:

The
Wedding-
Day

HAIR breezes, sighs of sadness
Ye heard in my distress,
Now listen to my gladness
And dawning happiness.

“Ye wafted here my hero
From heaven’s azure heights,
Smoothing each rough sea billow,
And breathing all delights.

“No more the tear-drop gushing
Pleads for your soothing art;
Cool now my cheeks all blushing,—
For love flames in my heart!”

Then muttered Ortrud low to Frederick:
“Behold her! It is Elsa. She shall rue
This fateful hour her eye encounters mine!
Away, my partner in revenge, away!
Withdraw into the blackest shadows there:
Leave her to me. Thy work is to undo
That bold-faced knight, her hero, to his shame.
Leave her to my soft wiles.” And at the word
Dark Frederick had vanished in the night.

Then Ortrud crept from the cathedral steps
Into the pallid moonlight, slowly drew
Nearer the balcony, and whispered: “Elsa!”
And Elsa, startled, cried: “Who is it calls,—
Calls in the night my name so mournfully?”
Then Ortrud in a weak and piteous voice
Complained: “Wilt thou disown a hapless
friend?

Thou who hast sent me into bitter woe?”
And Elsa full of sympathy replied:

"Ortrud, and is it thou? What dost thou here,
Unhappy woman?" Quickly Ortrud cried:
"Yea, that I am — unhappy, wretched woman,
And thou, indeed, hast cause to call me so.
In former days within the forest's depths
I dwelt in solitude and happy peace.
How harmed I thee? wherefore didst thou
harm me?"

Joyless I mourned in secret solitude
The heavy curse that rested on my race.
But harmed I thee? wherefore didst thou harm
me?"

Then Elsa: "Woman, thou reproachest me?
What have I done to bring thee bitter woe?"
And Ortrud answered: "Thou didst break my
peace.

How couldst thou grudge me my poor, happy
lot?

Now I am cursed as the unhappy wife
Of him thy haughty pride and scorn disdained."
And Elsa cried, her sweet soul wrung with grief,
At these harsh words: "O gracious heavenly
powers,

What sad reproaches in these bitter words!"

Then weeping piteous, Ortrud spake on:

"Yea, by some strange delusion, evil spell,
He dared to cast aspersion on thy name
And madly cursed thee for a dreadful crime.

Now, he has wakened from the evil spell,
Yea, he is rent by bitterest remorse,
And sore distress by fearful punishment.
See, thou art happy. All thy blameless woes
Prepared thee for these smiles of boundless
joy.

The
Wedding-
Day

Depart, I pray, from me who am accurst.
Go, leave me to my fate of bitter pain.
Let not the voice of my distress and shame
Break sadly on thy cloudless happiness."
And Elsa spake: "Have mercy, kindly Heaven!
So blest am I, so richly blest, with joy,
I were ungrateful for God's wondrous gifts
If I should thrust away in cold disdain
A child of sorrow seeking aid from me.
Nay, never shall I do it. Ortrud, wait!
Myself shall open wide the door for thee."

So Elsa left the balcony, and quick
Through palace corridors and winding stairs
Descended on her errand of fair love
And tender mercy. Meanwhile Ortrud kneeled,
And in the shadow of the church of God
She cursed God's name, and called with heart
of hate
To her old gods of pagan craft and power:
"Ye ancient gods, forsaken, grant revenge!
Strike death to them who have profaned your
fires!
Smile on the work of vengeance in my heart!
Strengthen my soul to fierceness for your
wrongs!
Odin, thou strong and mighty, give me
strength!
Freia, sweet queen, bend down to me with help!
Prosper my cause with gifts of deadly guile!
Gods of the ancient days, speed my revenge!"

And Elsa came and opened wide the door,
Holding a taper in her lily hand,



Elsa and Ortrud

And kindly spake: "Dear Ortrud, where art thou?"
Who answered: "Here, and kneeling at thy feet."

The
Wedding-
Day

And Elsa cried in tenderest sympathy:
"Alas, how strange and sadly thou art changed
Since last I saw thee proud and beautiful!
My heart is stirred with sympathy and pain
To see thee thus so lowly and so sad.
Pray, rise! And do not importune me thus.
Wert thou my foe, I freely pardon thee;
And if through me thy fatal sorrow came,
I pray thee grant forgiveness unto me.
Further, of him whom I shall wed at morn
I shall entreat, and surely he will grant
Pardon for thee and for thy husband's doom.
By fair to-morrow's dawn be thou prepared,
Arrayed in royal raiment beautiful,
To go with me to yon cathedral steps,
There to meet him, my hero sent by Heaven,
Whose happy bride I evermore shall be."

And Ortrud, seeming grateful, lowly spake:
"Accept my deepest thanks for all thy help,—
My heart is bound to thee in grateful bonds.
How can I ever such great love repay,
I am so helpless and so poor and sad?
Call me not friend, but let me serve thee well,
I am thy slave and vassal till I die.
Perchance the gift the gods have given me,
That neither craft nor sorrow yet hath
quenched,
May sometime serve to shield thy life from
harm,

The
Wedding-
Day

And rescue thee from some impending woe."
And innocent of heart, fair Elsa asked:
"What gift is this? and what impending woe?"
Thereat dark Ortrud: "Warning words I speak!
Trust not too blindly in thy present bliss
Lest evil fortune seek and spurn thy joy,
And thou be left forsaken, desolate.
Let me unfold the future for thy good:
Trust not the present too confidently.
Hath it not entered into thy fond heart
That he who came to thee by miracle
May in the same strange way be lost to thee?"
But smiling, Elsa answered: "Poor sad soul,
If thou couldst know with me the living joy
Of perfect love that holds nor doubt nor fear!
Thou dost not know the rapture and the
strength
That perfect faith can give to loving hearts;
Come now with me, and learn what love may
mean,—
How sweet the confidence, how strong the
trust.
This is the perfect faith of perfect love,
And this alone gives perfect happiness."

But Ortrud muttered low that none might hear:
"Ah, haughty pride, soon thou shalt learn of
me,
And find thy fond illusions turned to pain!
These weapons of her faith in my deft hands
Shall wreak my vengeance in her very love."
So walked they, Ortrud muttering her words,
But the fair Elsa hearing not,— perchance

The
Wedding-
Day

Thinking she murmured something more of thanks.

Careless and confident in her great love,
She led the treacherous Ortrud to the house
Where servants held the flaring torches high,
Led her within, and softly closed the door.
Ah, Elsa! in the kindness of thy soul
Thou hast a serpent to thy bosom taken,
To sting thee with the venom of distrust.

No sooner had they disappeared from view,—
These women different as night and day,—
Than from the shadows Frederick came forth,
And stood before the door, and muttered low:
“There entered hate and ruin to that house!
Woman, fulfil thy crafty mission dark!
Nor will nor power have I to hinder thee.
Honor is lost and valor crushed to earth,
Now shall hate follow to avenge my shame.
Come life or death, but one last joy is mine,—
Vengeance on those who spoiled me of my
name!”

The day begins to dawn; and beautiful the east
With faint, far splendor of the breaking morn,
So pure, so bright, the heaven-opening dawn.
Brighter the day grows. And the trumpet’s
blast
Sounds from the turret, while the answering
blast
Reëchoes from some distant tower. The day
More brilliant answers the strong call. And
now

The Wedding- Day

The tramp of footsteps echoes on the stones,—
Perchance some castle servitors draw near.
And Frederick in haste conceals himself
Behind the grim cathedral's buttressed wall.
Then come the castle servitors with shouts
And morning greetings, busy with their tasks,—
Some drawing water at the fountain's edge;
Some who unlock the gates with ponderous
keys;

And here the trumpeters with lusty throats,
Who blow again their early morning call.
Soon the Brabantine nobles come in groups,
And with them throngs of strong-limbed war-
riors,

Who greet each other with the gladsome cry:
"Early the call that summons us to-day,
For this fair morn is full of promise fair.
He who such marvels hath displayed to us
May yet to-day more wonders bring to pass."

Then from the palace the King's herald came
With four stout trumpeters, and loudly cried:
"Hear ye our King's august decree, and see
Ye give good heed obeying his command!
Beneath the ban he lays Count Telramund,
Who falsely dared to challenge God's ordeal;
And all who harbor him or give him aid
Shall share his doom, as ancient law enacts."
And all the people answered with one voice:
"Accurséd be his evil, traitorous heart,
Condemned by God's just judgment before all;
Let every true man shun him as the plague,—
And let him find no rest and peace on earth."

Then cried the herald yet more wondrous news:
"Hear ye yet further what the King decrees:
The noble stranger, sent by Heaven's will,
Who truly gained the Princess Elsa's heart,
The King doth now invest with crown and
land;

Yet since he doth not will to reign as duke,
Let all men call him, — Guardian of Brabant!"
Then loud they shouted: "Hail the valiant
knight!

Hail to the prince whom Heaven has sent to us!
We vow allegiance and our loyal love!
Long life to thee, great Guardian of Brabant!"

Yet still spake on the herald of the King:
"Now hear the Guardian of Brabant's good
will:

To-day he bids all to his wedding feast.
To-morrow he will call you to the camp
To follow him to battle for the King.
He scorns to linger in soft dalliance,
But leads you on to glory and to fame!"
And gladly all the happy warriors cried:
"We follow to the battle where he leads,
And fierce and valiant be our strong right arms.
Glory awaits us fighting 'neath his shield,
For God hath sent him to bless fair Brabant."
But here a jealous noble made complaint:
"To-morrow morn he leads us far away!"
One added: "Yea, to meet a distant foe!"
And still another: "Rashness will bring woe."
But now a fourth spake out: "If he commands,
Who disobeys this Guardian of Brabant?"
And suddenly a stranger heard their words

The
Wedding-
Day

And cried aloud: "Yea, I would disobey!"
And looking at him in amaze they cried:
"Who art thou? Yea, we see now who thou
art,—

The banished Telramund. What dost thou here,
Forgettest thou that any serf may slay thee?"

Then boldly he: "Nay, death I do not fear.

I come to lighten your blind eyes with truth.

Hear ye! The man who seeks to lead you on,
Himself is naught but fraud and sorcery;

And I shall charge him with it to his shame."

Amazed they whispered: "What boldness this!

What mean thy words? 'Tis treason on thy lips,

And thou art lost if thou art overheard."

Then quick they hid him from the people's
sight,

For all were thronging the cathedral steps.

Then came the pages crying to the throng:

"Make way! make way! Our Princess Elsa
comes!

Open a path to the cathedral door!"

And all the nobles stood along the steps,
Making broad passage for the princess' way.

Then the fair ladies who attended her

In long procession wended their slow way

From the great Kemmenate's high balcony,

By winding stairways, to the crowded streets.

Joyful and fair their faces, full of grace

And royal dignity their every step,

And clothed in attire rich, magnificent,

And dazzling with their ornaments and jewels.

These also at the first cathedral steps

Stood lovingly and sang this welcome-song:

MAY every joy attend her,
So long in sorrow bound!
May Heaven its blessing lend her,
And angels guard her round!
She comes with blushes laden,
So pure and radiant;
All hail, thou spotless maiden,
Fair Elsa of Brabant!"

The
Wedding-
Day

And Elsa now appeared, a perfect bride,
Modest and gentle with her downcast eyes,
Pure as an angel from the highest heaven;
Clothed all in white, simplicity itself,
But in simplicity most regal rich
And radiant with lustrous, shining pearls.
She walked a princess in her every mien,—
A vision of delight for all true hearts.
And now her foot she placed upon the step
That led to the great doorway opened wide
Of the cathedral. Whereat suddenly
The haughty Ortrud, far back in the throng,
Rushed forward from her place in angry mood,
And boldly there confronted her, and cried:
"Elsa, stand back! no longer I endure
To follow like some slave-girl in thy path!
My place is first, and here I now demand it!
Give me my precedence, and bow to me."

And Elsa spake: "Ortrud, what do I hear!
How changed thy tone, which late was full of
prayers."

But Ortrud answered: "If I did forget
My true position for a passing hour,
Yet think not I will crawl beneath thy feet.

The
Wedding-
Day

My suffering doth drive me to revenge, —
I claim my rightful rank before you all!"
Then Elsa: "Was it only falsehood then
That wailed last night so piteous at my door,
And now in haughty pride thou wouldst pre-
cede,—

Thou wife of one whom God and man dis-
owned?"

But scornful Ortrud answered in fierce hate:
"Before that unjust ordeal banned his life,
My husband's name was honored in the land,
A very symbol of fair chivalry,
And all men knew and feared his stalwart sword.
Yea, feared and honored both his name and
sword.

But thy lord, say, who knoweth who he is?
This nameless one, whom no one ever knew?
Yea, even thou durst not make known his name!
Nor canst thou tell us, — speak it if thou canst! —
What is his race; whether of noble strain;
Whence came he by the river to this land;
Whither and when will he depart again?
Ah, no! Thou canst not say. It might bring woe,
So he forbade all questions and all doubt."

Thereat fair Elsa answered all her taunts:
"Poor slanderer! whose soul is hot with guilt,
Hear thou, if I can trust my heart to speak.
So pure and noble is my chosen knight
That in each feature shows his high-born race.
Oh, can there live a soul so mean and low
To doubt the stamp and livery of Heaven?
Hath he not overthrown thy recreant knight,
And stood the victor in the great ordeal?

Speak, lieges, who have seen God's judgment
given,
Is he not true, your Guardian of Brabant?"

The
Wedding-
Day

But suddenly the people loudly shout:
"Make way! make way! King Henry draweth
near!"

Then slowly came to the cathedral steps
Another great procession, fair to see,
Gorgeous in raiment for the wedding-day,
Stately in dignity and solemn joy, —
King Henry, and the Guardian of Brabant,
And a long train of valiant Saxon knights.
But hearing sound of strife, the King in haste
Advanced, the people shouting loud:
"All hail, King Henry! Hail, Guardian of Bra-
bant!"

But the King asked: "What strife is this I hear?
Who dares to bar our wedding march to-day
Toyon cathedral? What angry words are these,
All clamorous?" Amazed the noble knight
Who came to his fair wedding likewise cried:
"Alas, what rude, unseemly strife is this?
Great Heaven! And do I see the evil Ortrud
here?"

Where thou art, wretched woman, follows woe!"

Then Elsa fell in tears upon his breast:
"My lord! my dear protector, hear me now!
My champion, shelter me from her fierce wrath.
Blame me, if I have gone against thy will.
Last night I found her weeping at my door;
I took her in to comfort her distress;
And now with harsh and bitter words of hate

The
Wedding-
Day

She taunts me, for my boundless trust in thee."
Then spake the knight to Ortrud in stern words:
"Away from her, thou fiend in human form!
Thine evil arts will have no triumph here.
Dear Elsa, tell me, hath her venom words
Brought any taint of doubt to thy pure soul?
Come, let thy tears be only tears of joy!"

And taking the fair Elsa by the hand
He led her up the long cathedral steps,
But had not reached the splendid carven door
Before another figure barred the way,—
A fierce intruder, mad with guilt and hate,
The evil-hearted Count of Telramund.
All started up in horror as he came,
And whispered: "See him here! 'Tis Telra-
mund!"

Away, bold Count! Thy life is forfeit, man!"
But with a loud and angry voice he cried:
"King Henry—ye deluded nobles—halt,
And hear my words!" Then spake the King
amazed:

"Begone! thy life is forfeit! Get thee hence!"
But Frederick stood still and loudly cried:
"Hear me! for ye have done me grievous wrong!
This man profaned and foiled high Heaven's
ordeal

Through vilest sorcery, and deceived you all.
This gleaming knight, who stands in boldness
here,

I solemnly accuse of sorcery!
And all his glory won in that false fight
Shall scatter like the dust before the wind.
See how unjust was all that ordeal cruel

By which ye branded me with basest shame,
For never did you ask his name and rank
When he came forward on the battle field.
Forbid me not to ask that question now —
Let my lips frame the fatal test for him:
Tell me thy name, thy station and thy race.
I ask thee this before the whole great world.
Thou hearest! Why this guilty silence now?
Ah, King and nobles, let him answer this.
Who is he, floated hither on the tides,
And weirdly guided by a snow-white swan?
Such strange familiars of the enchanter's art
Surely belong to no plain honest man.
Now let him stand and answer to the truth.
If he can do it, let my doom be sore;
But if he will not tell you who he is,
Or whence he comes, then let him stand con-
demned,
Disgraced, dishonored by our knighthood's
laws!"

Then spake the valiant Guardian of Brabant:
"I need not answer thee, thou lying knight,
Whose false heart Heaven already hath con-
demned.

The doubts and sneers of evil-hearted men
Can never harm me. Truth to Heaven appeals!"
But Frederick persisted in his cause:
"I hurl thee back thy bold and shameless words,
And now on thee I call, O King, most true,
If he scorns me as worthless base-born thrall,
Perchance he will allow thy right to ask?"
And answering him the mystic knight replied:
"Yea, dare I the King's honored self refuse,
And all the princes of the highest realms,

The
Wedding-
Day

If I do deem it best. They cannot doubt,
For they have seen the goodly deed I did.
That speaks for me, and shows God's favor just.
There's only one to whom I must respond
If she shall ever doubt my love, and ask,—
My fair bride Elsa."

As he looked he cried:
"Dear Elsa, why so pale and trembling now?"
And Ortrud whispered low to Frederick:
"A dark dismay is stealing to her heart;
Within her bosom seeds of doubt are sown.
He who has brought our honor unto shame,
He is undone, if now he tells the truth."
But the good King spoke out in confidence:
"Some secret great thou hidest, noble knight,
And if thou wilt, let it remain unknown.
We hold to thee against all wiles and woes,—
By valiant deeds we know thy noble worth."

Then looked the knight at Elsa's fair pale face,
And to himself with sad foreboding, spake:
"Dear Elsa! do I see her heart in pain,
In dread dismay at some disaster feared?
Is she beguiled by yonder lying wretch?
O gracious Heaven! guard her from all harm,
And let no doubt find entrance to her heart!"
While the fair Elsa murmured to herself:
"This secret that he hides, would it bring woe?
If he doth will, let it remain unknown.
He saved my honor; what ingratitude
If I should disregard his smallest wish.
Yet if I knew the secret, slightest breath
Of it should never breathe from my closed lips.
Ah, what a dread within my heart has grown!"

Then spake the King again in confidence:
"Brave knight, thou needest not to answer him
Who in his deep disgrace would bring thee
shame.

We know thee true, and never shall we doubt."

And all the warriors cried most heartily:

"We trust in thee, and never shall we doubt.

We stake our faith upon thy high renown,

Our hearts and hands are thine. Yea, we are
sure

Thy name is noble, though we know it not."

Then at their shout of confidence and trust

The valorous champion answered gratefully:

"Ye valiant hearts, I thank you for your words;

Ye shall not rue the trust this hour hath shown,

Although ye know not yet my name and race."

Then Frederick creeping close to Elsa, where
She stood alone absorbed in thought, spake
low:

"Believe me, Elsa, I can tell thee true

How thou mayest know the secret of all this:

Let me but wound him in the slightest way,—

One tiny drop of blood,—and thou shalt know.

What now he hides he freely will declare.

Nor will he leave thy side for evermore.

This very night I will be near to thee,

Call me, 't is done, and there is naught to fear."

But Elsa scorned him: "Get thee gone from
me,

Thou canst not tempt me to thy evil deeds."

Then the swan-knight came forward to her
side:

"Dear Elsa, dost converse with some good
friend?

The
Wedding-
Day

What! is it ye, ye wretched, curséd ones,—
Malignant Ortrud and fierce Frederick?
Depart from her, and cross her path no more,
And may I nevermore your faces see!
Come now, dear Elsa, kneel not at my feet;
Arise, my love! Lift up thine eyes and heart!
In thy true heart and hand, is all my hope.
Let not distrust thy happy heart enslave.
Dost thou desire to question me, my love?"

Perchance in that one moment as she kneeled
There at his feet she had betrayed her doubt,
And her heart's shame that she had doubted
him,

For quickly now all resolute she rose,
And bravely cried: "Thou art my champion,
Who saved my life and honor from my foes;
Thou art my hero, and in thee I trust;
High over every doubt and chilling fear
Rises my perfect love and constant faith!"
And while she spake he caught her to his
breast

With the fond words: "Come, dearest Elsa,
come!

Now to the altar of the loving God
To plight our happy faith for evermore!"

For the great organ had begun the strains
Of the triumphant wedding-festival.
Shouted with joy the happy multitudes:
"Behold the hero sent to us by Heaven!
All hail, our mighty Guardian of Brabant!
All hail! Thrice hail, fair Elsa of Brabant!
May every joy and blessing go with thee!

Hail to thee, royal maiden of Brabant!
May Heaven's love and favor be with thee!
Hail to thee, royal Elsa of Brabant!"

The Wedding- Day

Amid the shouts of triumph moved they on,
The good King leading with the bridal pair;
They reached the topmost step; but Ortrud still
In bitter anger looked and fiercest hate,
Lifted her arm in a malignant curse.
And Elsa saw and shuddered in affright,
But loud the noble organ sounded forth,
And gaily the procession moved in state,
Through the cathedral doors, and up the aisle
To the great altar. Music surged and throbbed
Around the columned heights. The arches rang
With mighty chords of harmonies divine;
The fretted ceiling poured melodious tides
Adown where painted windows danced with
joy.

All was forgot but ecstasy and love.
Doubtings and rancor and fierce hate forgot,
All were caught up within the new-born joy
Of two glad hearts plighting eternal troth.
All hearts were glad, all felt the mystic spell
Of that cathedral of the love of God.

LOHENGGRIN. PART III

THE FATAL QUESTION



BLESSÉD be all espousals of true
love!

Blesséd be noble bridals, chaste
and pure!

Blesséd the joy of marriage festi-
vals!

Blesséd the happy music of the bells!

Brimming with joy has been this wedding-day;

Noble the bridegroom, radiant the bride;

A thousand times glad shouts have rung the
air;

A thousand times by happy multitudes

Their joy and health been pledged in ruddy
wine;

The harp and tabret gave the melody,

While joyous voices sang the festive songs.

Now have the shades of evening gathered
round,

And a fair bridal chamber waits in peace

To give its blessing to two happy hearts.

Its oriel casement looks out on the night,

And sees the silver moonlight and the stars;

Its quiet atmosphere is all of dreams

And tender love and heavenly ecstasy.

There comes a sound of music from afar,—

Louder it grows as if approaching near.

Perchance they bring the bridegroom and the
bride

To this still chamber of the peace of love.

Yea, now they come. A song is on the air.

The door is opened and the ladies come,

Escorting the fair Elsa, perfect bride;

The Fatal Question

And now the King and nobles follow on,
Bringing the bridegroom to his loving bride.
Pages lead on with torches flaring high,
The music throbs in joyous ecstasy,
Majestic in its melody and power,
Upgathering in its exultant chords
The festive glory of all wedding hours.
And all the company with joyous hearts
Sing merrily this happy wedding song:

“**H**AITHFUL and true, bridegroom and
bride,
Enter the chamber where love waits to bless!
Valor and might, beauty so bright,
Bide here together in joy measureless!
Champion of duty, all joys attend!
Flower of beauty, bliss without end!
Sound of the revel no more delights you;
Come where affection's rapture invites you.
Sweetness and joy within ye shall find;
Feasting and mirth left gladly behind.
Valor and beauty, love waits to bless!
Bide here together in joy measureless!”

Then spake her ladies, wishing her all joy,
And lifting from her the long bridal veil:
“As solemn vows unite your hearts in love,
So fairest bride, we hallow thee to joy;
This hour shall be thy blessing in the days
When sadness may commingle with thy life.”
And fondly gave the King his parting kiss,
Embracing them and wishing them all joy.
Softly the company of loving friends

Withdrawing, paused a moment at the doors
And sang again, a song of sweet farewell:

**The Fatal
Question**

“Now side by side, bridegroom and bride
Rest in the chamber where love waits to bless!
Valor and might, beauty so bright,
Bide here together in joy measureless.
Champion of duty, gladly abide!
Flower of beauty, rest at his side!
Sound of the revel no more delights you;
Come where affection’s rapture invites you.
Sweetness and joy within ye shall find;
Feasting and mirth left gladly behind.
Valor and beauty, love waits to bless!
Bide here together in joy measureless!”

And now the friends have gone, the song has
ceased;
But joyous peace abides and boundless love.
There near the oriel casement sat the bride;
Near her, the bridegroom. Lights were burn-
ing low;
But the fair moonlight through the casement
streamed
On their glad faces, lustrous bright with love.
On her dear bridegroom’s breast fair Elsa
leaned,
As tenderly and low he spake to her:
“The sweet song dies, and now we are alone,—
The only time alone since first we met.
How like a dream the outer world has gone,
And all our tender pent-up thoughts may speak.
Elsa, my love, fair, gentle Elsa mine,
Art thou content, my bride, thy heart full blest?”

**The Fatal
Question**

And Elsa answered: "Words can never tell
The holy rapture filling all my soul.
Such love for thee is glowing in my heart,—
When thou art near, the bliss of heaven is
mine."

And he responded with all tenderness:
"Fair Elsa, sweetest blessing unto me,
If thou art blest, then have I double joy;
My heart is burning in its love for thee,—
I breathe the joy of gods, the bliss divine.
How wondrously has Heaven led us on,—
Ere we had met, thy heart had dreamed of me;
And when I came to be thy champion,
'T was love alone that led me to thy side;
Love showed me thou wert innocent and pure;
Love gave to thee my heart, my sword, my life!"

Then Elsa spake, recalling the past days:
"Yea, in a holy dream I saw thee first,
All glorious in the azure heights of heaven;
And when I saw thee next with waking eyes,
I knew that thou wert come from God's own
heart.

O, then I wished I were some flowing stream,
Tracing thine every step through flowery
meads;

Or some fair rose, out-breathing fragrance
sweet,

And dying for thy sake beneath thy feet.

Say, is this love? How shall I ever know,—

This word unspeakable and full of joy.

'T is like thy name that never may be breathed.

Must what I prize the most be never named?"



Elsa and Lohengrin

Then with a start of fear he whispered: "Elsa!"
But she went on: "Yea, listen to my name.
How sweetly love doth sound it from thy lips!
Canst thou deny to me the sound of thine?
Now in this blissful hour reveal thy name, —
Let my mouth speak it, sweet with honeyed
love."

The Fatal Question

Again he cried in terror at her words:
"My darling Elsa, O, what hast thou said?"
Yet on she went in thoughtless eagerness:
"Yea, whisper softly. For the world's asleep
And never shall it hear or dream a word."
But pointing through the casement answered
he:
"Dost thou not breathe the incense of the
flowers,
Bearing a tide of deep, mysterious joy;
And dost thou need to ask how comes this
grace?
Ask not, but let the fragrance bless thy soul.
So is the mystic charm that binds our hearts.
When, sweetest Elsa, I beheld thee first,
I cared not who thou wert or what thy woe;
Mine eyes beheld thee, and my whole heart
loved.
And as the senses yield to odors wild,
Outwafted from the dark, unfathomed night,
So thou didst thrall my heart by thy pure soul,
Though I beheld thee sunk in grief and shame."

Then the fair Elsa gravely answered him:
"O, could I show thee my devotion true,
By more than fond emotions, loving words,

The Fatal Question

Do some good deed to bind thy heart to me,
Suffer for thy sake bitterest pain or woe!
Were doubt and danger threatening thy life,
O, gladly would I fly to thy relief!
Were care or trouble come upon thy heart,
O, quickly would I aid and comfort thee!
Mayhap thy secret holdeth deadly woe —
Therefore thy lips perforce are closely sealed;
Perchance some danger and disaster dread,
If to the world this knowledge were made
known.

Let it be so, and did I share thy trust,
If in my heart it lay secure and hid,
Then would I comfort thee with all my love.
No power should tear thy secret from my breast;
Not death itself should force it from my lips."

And holding her white hand, and looking deep
Into her eyes, most wistfully and long,
Then spake he: "O my loved one, be content!"
"Yea, dear my love," she quickly answered him,
"Make me content by thy full confidence,
That I no longer live in mystery.
Trust me with this dear secret of thy soul, —
All that thou art, I want my heart to know."
But still he pleaded: "Say no more, dear
heart."

Yet she persisted: "Tell me, O, I pray!
Declare the truth — thy noble rank and power!
Reveal thy name — thou never shalt regret!
My heart shall hold thy secret as the grave."

Then made he answer tenderly and sad:
"Dear Elsa, I have shown thee deepest trust

The Fatal Question

When I confided in thy promised word ;
And while thou keepest that inviolate
Noblest of women is my own true bride.
O, let my arms enfold thee now in love!
Come, rest thou here, my love, my gentle wife!
Let me behold the light of thy dear eyes
Where dwelleth all my world of happiness.
O, to my true heart let me press thee now,
And feel thy loving breath upon my cheek!
Nearer and nearer let me press thee, love,
Till perfect bliss enfoldeth thee and me!
Yea, thy sweet love consoleth me for all
That I for thy dear sake have ever lost;
No prouder lot in all God's world than mine,
Which gladly I relinquished for thy sake.
A king might offer me his greatest crown,—
I should with scorn the proffered gift refuse;
There's only one fair gift makes good my loss,
And that, thy confidence and thy true love.
So banish every doubting from thy heart;
Thy perfect love shall be my proudest boast.
Banish all thought of fear and night and woe,
My homeland is a land of light and joy."

And Elsa cried with sudden terror struck:
"O Heaven, help me! What is this I hear!
What half-told secrets have thy lips betrayed!
A glimpse of glamour thou hast let me see,
And now new terrors bring their brooding
woes.

The rank thou hast forsaken was so high,
Thou camest here from such transcendent joy,
That thou wilt ever yearn for this again.
How can I ever hope to keep thee here?

The Fatal Question What power have I in my poor human love?
Some fatal day will rob me of thy heart,
And leave me hopeless and disconsolate."

Then cried he: "Do not speak thus, O my love!
Do not torment thy soul with cruel words!"

But she replied: "These torments come from
thee,

For now how few will be the fleeting days
Till thou art gone and I in grim despair.

Yea, in the daily dread of my sad fate,
My cheek in care and sadness will grow pale;
Then some day thou wilt tire of all my tears,
And I in sorrow shall be left alone."

Then answered he: "Thy beauty ne'er shall
fade

So long as doubt is banished from thy heart!"
"O, give me quick," she cried, "some magic
spell

To bind thy heart forever to my heart!
A strange enchantment hedges thee around,—
By miracle thou camest to my help.

How may I chain thee to my very life,
So that my soul shall have no further fear? . . .
Why do I start? What strange sounds come
to me?

Dost thou not hear? O, bend thine ear and
hark!"

But he responded: "Nay, 't is nothing, love!"
"Thou hearest naught?" she cried in startled
tones,—

"See, there! the swan! the swan! upon the
wave!

Thou callest him! I see the approaching skiff!"

But softly he made answer: "Nay, my love!
Hush these vain fancies! Bid them now be-
gone!"

Yet Elsa cried: "Nothing can give me peace,
Nothing can quench the longing in my soul.
Yea, though it cost me now my very life,
I must know whence thou comest, who thou
art!"

"O, Elsa dear," he prayed, "I do beseech!"
But still she pleaded, desperate in words:
"Nay, I must know thee, man of mystery!
Hear now the stern demand I make of thee:
Reveal thyself, reveal to me thy name!"

"O, Elsa dear, forbear!" he prayed again.
But still she strove: "Nay, tell me who thou art!
Tell me thy home, thy rank, tell me thy name!"
And in an awful cry of pain he sobbed:

"O, Elsa, woe is me! What hast thou done?"
And as he spake, there came a sudden sound
Of opening doors and hurried footsteps near,—
In rushed four men with drawn swords in their
hands,

Led on by evil-hearted Frederick.
And Elsa saw them first, and shrieked in fear:
"O, save thyself, my love! Thy sword! thy
sword!"

And quickly snatching up the sword, which lay
Close to the couch, she drew it from its sheathe,
And strong he seized it in his valiant hand,
And struck a mighty blow at Frederick,
And felled him lifeless at the fatal stroke.
The others threw their vile swords at his feet,
And kneeled for pardon to the valiant knight;

The Fatal Question While Elsa, faint and overcome with fear,
Sank down unconscious to the marble floor.

Then there was silence long and terrible,
For the sad hour of awful fate had struck;
The doom of earthly happiness had tolled;
And long in wordless anguish still he stood, —
Now wrecked in life and hope and happiness.
And looking sadly at his fair young wife,
He murmured, love and sorrow in his face:
“God pity us! Our joy forever gone!”
And gently lifting her in loving arms,
He placed her softly on the bridal couch.
Thereat she opened her sad eyes and prayed:
“O God, have mercy on me! Pity me!”

Then at his sign the guilty nobles rose,
And to them stern he spake: “Take up yon
corpse
Of Telramund, dead in most treacherous
shame,
And bear it to the King’s great judgment-hall.”
Then to the women whom he called, he spake:
“Array my Elsa, my sweet, gentle wife,
In all her bridal garments, royal fair,
And let her come to me before the King,
When the new light of day has come again.
There will I answer all her heart’s dark doubts,
There shall she know her husband’s name and
fame!”

And now another fateful day is born!
A brilliant dawn, with rosy, heavenly light

And subtle glimmerings from another world,
Presage and prophecy of things to come.
The silver Scheldt is winding its slow way
Across the flowery meadows. In the mist
Of early morning Antwerp, many-towered,
Looms up most beautiful and grand.
And here again is the grim judgment-oak,
The arbiter of passing centuries.
Perchance another judgment-day has come,
For here now gather the Brabantine hosts,
Nobles and warriors with their flaunting flags.
And lo! here comes King Henry with his men,
His strong-limbed Saxons with their clanging
swords.

The trumpets blow their summonings, and all
Beneath the banner of the King array;
And with a shout of thunder, loud they cry:
"Hail to our sovereign! Royal Henry, hail!"

Then spake the King: "My constant thanks to
you,

My loyal lieges of this fair Brabant!
How glows my heart with overflowing pride
To find in all parts of our German land
Such noble bands of splendid warriors!
Now let the Hunnish hordes in wrath draw
nigh

And they shall find a valiant front opposed;
Yea, never will they dare to stir again
From their rude deserts in the far-off East.
For German lands the German sword we draw!
So shall we guard and hold the German realm!"
And all take up the echoing royal words:
"For German lands the German sword we
draw!

The Fatal Question

So shall we guard and hold the German realm!"
Again the King: "Where tarries now the one
Whom God hath sent as champion of the right,
The glorious Guardian of our fair Brabant?"

Then slowly came four nobles bearing in
A covered body on a funeral bier.
And all cried: "What is this? What carry they?
These men are vassals of Count Telramund."
Then asked the King: "Whom bear ye here so
sad?"

Your looks announce some evil, awful thing."
And they made answer: "Please Your Majesty
So wills our lord, the Guardian of Brabant,
That who this is he will himself make known;
He shortly comes who sent us hither thus."
Scarce had they spoken, when with sounds of
woe

There came another saddened company, —
Elsa with all her ladies, walking slow.
And at the sight the people cried, "Alas,
Our Elsa, peerless princess of Brabant!
How sad and pale, yet tearless are her eyes!"
Then Henry met her, led her to a seat,
And spake: "Dear Elsa, why this heavy grief?
Because thy hero goeth to the war,
Art thou so sad, dear loving heart and true?"
But Elsa could not answer in her grief,
Nor could she lift her sad eyes to his face.

Then rose a sudden tumult in the air,
The people crying with exultant shouts:
"Make way! make way! The Guardian of Bra-
bant!"

All hail, great champion, Guardian of Brabant!"
To him the King: "Hail and all hail to thee!
The faithful vassals thou didst bravely call
Are waiting here to follow thee to war,
Their hearts assured of certain victory!"
But he replied: "My sovereign and my lord,
Pray do not blame me for my woeful words.
These faithful hearts whom I have called to
go
I cannot lead to battle. God forbids!"

Then cried the King and all: "God give us help!
What mystery is hidden in thy words!"
And he made answer: "This my only plea,—
I come not now as leader of the hosts;
I come to ask for judgment and for right.
And first of all, let me uncover this.
This is the body of Count Telramund;
And am I guilty for this fearful death,—
I ask of you in law of right and truth?
With treachery he sought my life at night:
Pronounce, if justly I have slain the wretch?"
And the King answered, and all men agreed:
"As thy hand justly smote him to the earth,
So also may God's judgment deal with him!"

In slow and sadder voice, then on he spake:
"Yea, and another wrong ye now must hear!
This also must I tell to all the world.
This gentle wife whom Heaven gave to me,
By sad beguiling of some evil heart
Has failed to keep her fair allegiance sworn."
And all cried sadly: "Nay, this cannot be!
She could not do such heavy, grievous wrong!"

The Fatal Question

But he spake on: "Ye heard her promise given
That she would never ask me for my name.
Know then,— that sacred promise is forsworn;
For she hath given ear to evil tongues.
And now to soothe the wildness of her doubts,
No longer will I hide the sought-for truth.
Boldly I dare the menace of my foes,
And name my name and race and noble rank.
Now mark me well, if I have feared to show
This secret to the garish light of day,—
For prouder rank I hold than you can guess,
Prouder than any nobles of you all,
Yea, prouder than your noble-hearted King."
Then answered all: "O, wondrous mystery,
Which he hath guarded! Shall we hear it now?
O, would the secret never might be told!"

But with an upward look, as if he saw
The glorious light of some far distant land,
And was enthralled by its strange, heavenly
spell,
A sudden splendor shining in his face,
He spake his long-hid secret to their hearts,
Chanting the story like melodious song:

"**I**N distant land to mortal feet forbidden,
Standeth a castle, Monsalvat by name;
A gleaming temple in the midst is hidden,
So rich, not all the world its like could frame.

"Therein a Cup, throned in a light immortal,
That whoso sees from earthly sin is cleansed;
'T was brought by angels from the heavenly
portal,
Its coming hath a holy reign commenced.

"Once every year a dove from Heaven descendeth
To strengthen it anew for works of grace;
'Tis called the Grail. The power of Heaven
attendeth
The faithful knights who guard that sacred
place.

"He whom the Grail to be its servant chooses
Is armed henceforth invincible in might;
All evil craft its spell before him loses,
The powers of darkness he can put to flight.

"Though into distant lands the Grail may send
him,
The cause of injured virtue to maintain;
Still unimpaired its blessing will attend him,
If still unknown to all he can remain.

"By perils dread the Holy Grail is guarded;
No eye profane its wondrous light may see;
Its champion knight from doubtings must be
warded,—
If known to man, he must depart and flee.

"Compelled, I now reveal the sacred story!
The servant of the Grail I hither came:
My father Parsifal reigns there in glory,—
His knight am I,—and Lohengrin my name!"

Then cried the King: "O strange and blessed
words
That we have heard, and mystic, mighty name!
My tears flow fast! My heart is sad and glad!"

The Fatal Question

But Elsa moaned in agony of soul:

"The earth is reeling. O, how dark it grows!
Give me more air! O wretched, wretched me!"
And staggering, she would have fallen down,
But Lohengrin quick caught her in his arms,
And gently whispered: "Elsa dear, my love!
Alas, that this should come to thee and me!
When at the first my eyes beheld thy face,
Straightway my heart was all aflame with love;
And dared to hope for joys till then unknown.
The wondrous power, the heavenly miracle,
The strength which to my arm my secret
gave,—

All these should serve thy spirit pure and true.
Why didst thou tear that secret from my breast?
Now must I leave thee and for evermore!"

Then cried the King and all the warriors:

"Woe, woe to us! that thou must now depart!
Thou glorious hero, sent to us by Heaven!
When thou, our confidence, art lost to us,
Where shall we find our victory or peace?"
And Elsa pleaded: "Dearest husband, nay!
Thou shalt not go! I will not let thee go!
Let me make expiation for my sin!
Behold my sorrowing heart and deep remorse!
I lay repentant at thy very feet!"

But Lohengrin made answer: "Nay, sweet wife,
I cannot stay. I must, I must depart!
The Grail's aflame, and calls me back to serve!"
But Elsa cried: "Thou seemest godlike, yea,
Thou art, and surely heavenly merciful!
Let tears and sorrow wash away my guilt!

Let me repentant still behold thy face!
Forsake me not, although my sin was great!"
Then Lohengrin spake sadly: "Dearest soul,
Only one sentence has this awful sin,
And it doth wring my heart with equal pain:
Our doom is separation evermore,—
This is God's judgment and our punishment!"
And Elsa with a cry sank back in woe.

Then once again the King and warriors cried:
"Nay, do not leave us! Still remain with us
And lead thy loyal warriors to the fight!"
But Lohengrin made answer: "Hear, O King!
I dare not what your eager heart's desire.
Once known to men as champion of the Grail,
Should I in disobedience lead you on,
Each man would weaken, hoping all from me;
And self-reliance gone, defeat would come.
Nay, let me tell you what my soul discerns,—
I see, great King, thy splendid victory,
For thou shalt conquer the Hungarian hordes,
And free from foes our noble German land!"

And as he spake, there rose a sudden cry:
"The swan, the swan! Behold it on the stream!"
And Elsa piteous shrieked: "The swan! Woe's
me!"

Then Lohengrin stood on the river's brink
Majestic in his sorrow, and he spake:
"Too long I stay — I must obey the Grail!"
Then as the swan came nearer, soft he said:
"Belovéd swan! thou comest here for me,
Yet gladly had I spared thee, and this day.

**The Fatal
Question**

I thought the year would soon be safely passed,
When thy probation sad and strange would
close;

Then through the Holy Grail's transforming
grace

I hoped in thy true form to meet my swan.

O Elsa! could I but have bided here

Sharing thy bliss one holy, happy year,—

The Grail must have returned to thy embrace

Thy brother Godfrey whom thou deemest dead.

Should he return, and I in lands far off,

Give him, I pray, this horn and sword and
ring,—

This horn shall bring him help in danger's hour;

This sword shall lend him victory in fight;

This ring shall bring to mind a faithful friend

Who saved thee from thy deep distress and
woe.

Farewell, my love! farewell! dear Elsa mine!

Farewell! the Grail commands, and I obey!"

And as he turned to go the people cried:

"Woe, woe to us! Thou noblest, greatest
knight!

Our hearts are heavy at this parting hour!"

Then Ortrud like a serpent venom-toothed,

Quick glided to the front, hissed in his ear:

"Yea, go! Begone! Thou bold and brazen
knight,

And I will tell thy foolish bride a tale

Of him who draws thee in thy fairy skiff.

'T was I with evil art that wound the chain

Around a child's fair neck long, long ago,

And changed him by my magic to a swan!



The Farewell of Lohengrin

Well do I know the young prince of Brabant! **The Fatal**
But now he also goeth far away! **Question**
Elsa, thy brother takes thy lover hence
To distant lands and cometh back no more!
And well it is this knight remains not here,
Lest by his power thy brother might be freed."
Then all aghast they cried: "Accurséd wretch!
May God repay thee all these fiendish deeds!"
But Ortrud answered: "Yea, behold my deeds!
Thus do the ancient gods wreak vengeance
fierce,
For their forsaken altars and your sins!"

But Lohengrin had heard her furious talk,
Looked at her quietly with pitying eyes.
Then on the river bank he knelt in prayer—
A mute appeal to God the one supreme,
Defying pagan gods and heathen power
In which the hateful Ortrud put her trust—
A prayer of silence, but a prayer of power.
For as he prayed there floated into sight
A snow-white dove, a heavenly messenger,
The gift and symbol of the Holy Grail,
And hovered quietly above the skiff.
Then Lohengrin arose and joyfully
Loosed from the swan's fair neck the golden
chain;
And lo! the snow-white swan was seen no
more,
But in its stead a fair and radiant youth,
Young Godfrey, prince and heir of all Brabant,
Shining in silver garments, sparkling bright,
As if the gift of the resplendent stream!

The Fatal Question

Then with the word: "Behold your leader here!
The youthful Guardian of fair Brabant!"
The noble Lohengrin leaped to his boat.
The snow-white dove with gentle flutter seized
The golden chain within its dainty mouth,
And lo! it drew the boat along the tide!
It seemed a fairy vision as it swept,
In silent beauty down the silver stream,
To purple sunsets and the open sea.
And splendid shone the brave and armored
knight,
Standing majestic in the gliding skiff,
Resigned and yet triumphant in his fate.
A radiance seemed to glow about his brow,
A heavenly brightness in his upraised eyes.
Fair Elsa gazed upon him longingly,
With sad heart, yet with grateful, holy love,
That he had deigned to help her in her need,
And leave his seal of boundless love on her.
Then in the river's windings for a time
The fairy craft was lost to her fond eyes;
And for a moment turned she with deep love
To her dear brother Godfrey, lost so long;
And he, with first obeisance to the King,
Ran to her arms in eager, happy joy.
But evil Ortrud trembled, pale she grew,
And at the sight of Godfrey shrieked and fell:
She knew her end,—her magic power was gone,
And nothing left but black and utter shame.
But with a deep contempt the people looked
And scorned her. Then they turned with so-
lemn joy
And kneeled in homage to their fair young
prince.

The Fatal Question

And now the silver skiff was seen again
Afar upon the windings of the Scheldt,
Across the Antwerp meadows flowery fair,
And Elsa turned again and watched and prayed.
How sorrowful he stands there in his boat,—
He leaves his heart and happiness behind;
He goes to sternest duty, not to joy;
He trusted well a human heart, and failed.
But what a glory doth encircle him!
O, matchless knight! O, peerless champion!
O, splendid shining servant of the Grail!
And Elsa watched him through her falling tears,
And all the people wept with loud lament.

One fleeting, final glimpse was dimly seen—
A distant glimmer of a shining light—
Then all was gone, and Elsa lifeless sank
With the faint cry: "O, loving heart, farewell!"

THE END

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Lohengrin

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